

Who's Minding the Store?

What can a business do to reduce the no-response rate of their web inquiries?

A recently published study about the response rate from a business to a web inquiry has stirred one of my personal complaints about providing virtual customer service via your company web site. Often, it just doesn't work! The bottom line of the study was that 41% of Fortune 100 businesses never respond to a web inquiry, which leaves a lot of room for improvement.

What can a business do to reduce the no-response rate of their web inquiries? If closing every sales opportunity is your goal and your volumes are high enough, a clearly marked phone number with 24x7 on-duty operator is one sure way to respond to every type of web inquiry. The person or group responsible for answering the phone should also have the direct responsibility for resolving the actual web inquiry. Of course, in budget-limited operations this is often not a viable option and also defeats your prime objective in providing enough information on your web site for visitors to self-qualify themselves. So what is an alternative to providing expensive phone coverage?

Improve the information flow of your web site. Your home page should not only be an introduction to the company, but the starting point in directing visitors to the right web site location. Think of it as the "triage" procedure at a hospital emergency room - quickly assess the situation and get them to the right "specialist." You don't know their background or intention, but asking a few simple questions will help provide more direction. Are they interested in you because they are an investor, business partner, job seeker, or a customer with a need today or just looking for more information?

Once you point the visitors in the right direction, focus that section of the web site to their needs. Don't rely on a singular "Contact Us" form to collect all web inquiries, but try to customize it according to the context of the particular web location. In larger organizations this customized "Contact Us" form becomes more critical. By using e-mail routing you can establish rules to have the email forwarded to specific individuals in the company. Use the group providing the first-line phone coverage as a "watchdog" to ensure leads that are being followed up.

After the web inquiry is routed to the right individual the next difficult task is how to respond. Many of these web leads could be classified as "junk," but this does not mean they don't warrant a response. A balancing act now comes into play regarding how much time to dedicate to custom responses versus general form letters. Each inquiry deserves a response, but in many cases a typical form letter and additional information pointers will be sufficient. Have a pre-set list of responses scripted as a frequently asked questions format and encourage the prospect to continue to self-qualify themselves by directing them to specific web site locations. By feeding back actual frequently asked questions into the content of the web site, more self-education will occur and fewer questions will be raised that cannot be answered by the visitor from information readily available on the web site. The best way to respond to a question is to anticipate it and enable the visitor to find the answer on their own.

Always remember your web site is like a local store. If a customer asks you where the milk aisle is, as the owner, would you look at them and walk away without a response? However small or large your company is, every visitor deserves a response.

Market-Vantage LLC specializes in Integrated Web Marketing, helping companies develop and implement effective Internet marketing strategies for positive impact on business. Please call us at 603-888-5600 or email us at info@market-vantage.com for a free initial consultation to discuss your specific situation in confidence.